



STEPHEN VINCENT BENET NUMBER



# MARK TWAIN QUARTERLY

*I've read Mark Twain  
for a great many years -  
since I was nine or ten,  
I imagine - and hope to  
go on reading him  
while I can read. He  
still seems to me our  
great novelist*

*Stephen Vincent Benet*

WINTER-SPRING 1943-44

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# THE MARK TWAIN QUARTERLY

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The editor is most grateful to William Rose Benet for his valuable assistance in the preparation of this memorial to his brother.  
Without his help, many mistakes would have crept in.

# Stephen Vincent Benet

1898-1943

Stephen Vincent Benet was born in South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, July 22, 1898, the son of Colonel James Walker and Frances Rose Benet. His father was a graduate of West Point, as was his grandfather, after whom the poet was named. General Stephen Vincent Benet was at one time Chief of Ordnance of the United States Army. Colonel Benet was also an Ordnance Officer.

Stephen was not yet seven years old when his father was ordered to Benicia, the ancient capital of California. Here the boy spent eight of his most formative years. The big white house at the Benicia Ordnance post was Stephen's first intense memory, "a rare home, spacious, full of laughter, harboring many guests, and the center of congenial talk and wit."

Not so robust as other boys, he spent much time reading. He enjoyed, among many other books, Peck's *Bad Boy*, and a humorist with the peculiar name of "M. Quad," the works of G. A. Henty, Howard Pyle's *Men of Iron*, much of William Morris' poetry and prose, and *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

When ten he was sent to the Hitchcock Military Academy in California where he seems to have been bullied somewhat, as one gathers from the poem, "Going Back to School." Three years later Colonel Benet was ordered to the Arsenal at Augusta, Georgia. Stephen became more and more interested in the Civil War, and in the historic atmosphere of the old Southern town, with its beautiful gardens and surrounding pine forests. Summers were usually spent at Highlands, in the North Carolina Mountains, a spot remote from modern civilization. There the lad heard of feuds, and became acquainted with the language, customs, and mountain dances of the mountain-folk. From such experiences grew such a ballad as "The Mountain Whippoorwill."

When thirteen young Benet had his first verse published in *St. Nicholas Magazine*, which brought him a cash prize of three dollars. The title of the poem was "The Regret of Dives" and at that time the author was under the impression that "Dives" rhymed with "hives." Later on, before he entered Yale, his ballad "The Hemp" appeared in the *Century Magazine*, with illustrations by John Wolcott Adams.

Colonel Benet was an enthusiastic connoisseur of poetry and brought up his three children—Laura, William and Stephen—to know and to write verse.

Characteristically their love of America predominated,

"I have fallen in love with American names,

The sharp names that never get fat,  
The snakeskin-titles of mining claims,  
The plumed war-bonnet of Medicine Hat,

Tucson and Deadwood and Lost Mule Flat."

In his illuminating essay *The Sixth Man*, Benet tells us how he early came to realize that poetry "was not a dead thing or an alien thing or a dry game of words. I knew there were rules and that you could break the rules but that you must never break them **unintentionally**."

In 1915, when seventeen, Stephen published his first slender volume of poetry, *Five Men and Pompey*, and entered Yale University. One of his mentors was the late genial William Lyon Phelps, who in his *Autobiography* speaks of him as a "fore-ordained poet."

"Three of my undergraduate students, who were in college at the same time, and intimate friends, have now become famous through creative literary work. The playwright, Philip Barry, 1918; the poet, Stephen Vincent Benet, 1919; the novelist, Thornton Wilder. All three showed remarkable talent in the college."

In his sophomore year he was taken

on the Lit, the college magazine, of which he later became Chairman. He was universally popular at Yale, having a peculiar lovable disposition. His gift for satire and irony was exercised in such a manner that it charmed rather than antagonized his victims, and later on his friends were to consider him one of the most sparkling conversationalists of his generation.

In his junior year he won the Yale University Prize with a poem on Keats, "The Drug Shop, or Endymion in Edmonstoun." When America went to war that same year, Benet, although extremely near-sighted, fooled the examining board by memorizing the eye chart. But an attempt to peel potatoes without his double-lensed glasses limited his stay in the army to three days. With his honorable discharge he went to Washington where he entered the State Department as a cipher-clerk. Among his fellow workers was James Thurber the future humorist.

When the war was over he returned to Yale for his B. A., and just before graduation his second book of verse **Young Adventure**, 1919, was brought out by the Yale University Press. After working a few months in a New York advertising company, he went back for his M. A. Dean Wilbur Cross of the Graduate School, the future governor, let him substitute his third book of poetry, **Heavens and Earth**, for the usual dry-as-dust thesis.

The summer after leaving college he devoted to writing his novel **The Beginning of Wisdom** and went over to Paris with John Carter, another young writer. Stephen did a tremendous amount of miscellaneous reading and took some classes at the celebrated Sorbonne. Before long he had met and fallen in love with Rosemary Carr, a bright American girl who was reporting for the Paris edition of the Chicago **Tribune**.

To obtain enough money for his marriage he put aside everything else to write another novel called **Young Peo-**

**ple's Pride**. This was most successfully serialized in **Harper's Bazaar**. The book is dedicated to his future wife in a delightful poem, and one of the principal characters, Johnny Chipman, was modelled on a good friend John Chipman Farrar, president of Farrar and Rinehart. After a quiet wedding in Chicago the young couple returned to Paris and settled down in suburban Neuilly. Later on they returned to the United States for several years.

Having determined to write an epic of the Civil War, and having received a Guggenheim Fellowship for this project, Stephen and his wife and daughter again sailed for France. In Paris he spent much time going through hundreds of books dealing with the period. He refreshed his memory of earlier reading on the Civil War mixed with memories of the conversations held with his father. Through the years he had become thoroughly versed in his subject. The Guggenheim Fellowship for 1926-7 enabled him to concentrate upon his epic.

Published in 1929 **John Brown's Body** brought Benet the Pulitzer Prize, and much fame. The poem sold almost two hundred thousand copies in the poet's lifetime, and the publishers still report substantial sales.

"It was a long job and I was very much surprised—still am—at the reception it has had," he modestly wrote.

His brother William Rose Benet points out that the success of this book enabled him to proceed with his writing more at his own pace,

"His short stories grew better and better. Today one of the most famous is being interpreted on the screen by Walter Huston, Edward Arnold, and others. But at first he was loath to collect them. He brought out, instead, a collection of ballads and poems, work of the past fifteen years."

As time went on, and two more children were born, a boy and a girl, the Benets returned to New York and settled down in an old-fashioned stone-front house on the upper east side.

For Flag Day, 1942, he wrote a prayer for the United Nations, which was read by President Roosevelt over the radio.

‘—Grant us a common faith that man shall know bread and peace—Let us march towards the clean world our hands can make.’

After pluckily waging a long fight against arthritis, Stephen died March 13th, 1943, of a heart attack. At the time of his death he held a position of esteem of his fellow writers and readers seldom achieved by any writer. Unprecedented were the tributes newspapers, magazines, and on the air—all affectionate and all deserved.

We may well conclude with what Ellen Glasgow writes us,

“Yes, I had, and have, the highest regard for Stephen Benet. It was a shock to me to hear of his too early death. He was so vitally interested in life, when I last saw him, that my mind refuses to admit he is no longer among his friends.”

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### STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

Percy MacKaye

As Shelley the lark, as Keats the night-  
ingale,

So in communing song Benet has made  
capture

Of the angel hermit-thrush, his tonal  
rapture

Of sylvan solitudes. On the twilight  
trail

Where poesie and death share one green  
bough,

The bird and his bard are immortal  
companions now.

### LINES FOR THE BELOVED BARD

Joseph Auslander

Now that he stands upon a steeper hill  
Than any mountain he had ever trod,  
Even as he stands face to face with God,  
His heart is heavy with our human ill,  
His great heart broods upon the mys-  
tery still

Of brutish fears that grind man to the  
clod,

Of greed that breaks his back, the sav-  
age rod

That mutilates the mind it cannot kill.  
As long as men are hounded by stark  
hate,

He cannot rest; as long as men deny  
The stars and bread; he grapples with  
grim fate;

As long as women weep and children  
cry,

Attorney for the inarticulate,  
He is our trumpet to eternity.

---

Stephen Vincent Benet was a gifted ballad-writer. He incorporated his very self in these ballads, whether they treated of America or other far and storied places. By family tradition and training, he was an out and out American. He loved the America of the early heroes, the America of his forefathers (fighters all) and he revered the America of the present. If he had lived in the early days of the Republic, he would have been one of its legendary heroes.

In these ballads of Americans he put his own soul, and, therefore, they are authentic. In the years to come the children in the schools will read with great gusto and delight the stories in verse written of Americans, by a real American, and for Americans.

J. Corson Miller.



# Stephen Vincent Benet and His America

Robert Nathan

I want to change the title of this article: I want to add one letter to it, and make it Stephen Vincent Benet and his **Americas**. Because for Steve, I think as for so many of us—and yet more for him than for any—there were two Americas—the great America, and the small America. I'm not going to try to talk about the great America—the America of wars, of history, of the westward expansion, of the great people and the great places, of Lincoln and Webster, of Roanoke and Gettysburg. That was the America of the epics, of John Brown's Body, of Western Star, of such stories as the Devil and Daniel Webster, and Johnny Pye, and A Tooth For Paul Revere. The America I want to talk about is Stephen Vincent Benet's small America—because it was the part of Steve I knew best.

And I don't mean that this was a small land in miles and acres, or in strength and dignity. I mean rather, a land of people, altogether human and simple; people, not personages, and their small lyric happenings rather than epic events.

I had heard of Benet long before I met him. When I was at Harvard, an editor of the *Monthly*, there was a legend of a brilliant poet at Yale—as exciting in his way as a certain young poet at Vassar named Millay—we heard all kinds of stories about him; how he excelled at shooting craps and staying up all night, and how he was altogether a Byronic sort of character, or early Scott Fitzgerald—except that Scott was still in grammar school at the time. It was a typical Yale legend of the period, and it amused Steve very much, later on, when I told him about it. And it amused me, too, when I got to know him—to see how wide of the mark it had been—like most legends. Even the Harvard men of my generation were never quite as dull and dreary, or as

fat-headed as they were supposed to be, in the legend.

The young Steve that I met, back there in 1921, at the first Book Fair at Wanamakers was anything but a Byronic figure. He was rather shy, and very modest; he hoped to make a decent living by writing, and if he thought of himself as a great poet, or a great poet to be, he never said so. He was always modest—even later, when he knew what people thought of him; in later years, if he spoke with authority, it was with moral authority, from a clean heart, and an honest mind. He was, if anything, too enthusiastic for other peoples' work, too humble about his own. He wrote to me from Paris in 1927—"I am at present extinguished under the tall foolscap of this long poem. Nobody will read it, nobody will buy it, and the linotypers will just shrldu all over it. However, we are having a very nice time . . . there is a tennis court at Bizy and a bath tub somewhere in the village, though not in our house. I had some good Burgundy at Avignon." And Rosemary, in the same letter, wrote "Steve is still at his long poem; it gets longer and longer. He is furious that Boyd got to the Civil War before him, literarily I mean. No one has thought of it for ten years."

I met Steve a year later on the Champs Elysees. He had an entire set of galley proofs in one pocket of his overcoat, and three tins of sardines and a bottle of wine in the other. I read the galleys, and told him he'd win the Pulitzer Prize. He thought I was just being nice. The book was John Brown's Body.

John Brown's Body was part of the great America. It was history; it was epic poetry; it was the work of a great poet, who saw his country in its wholeness, and spoke for it. But the man I knew—the friend I had—was some-

thing else, too, besides an epic poet. Perhaps you'd call it less, because today people like to call smaller things less; but to me, in some ways, it was more. Because what that friend did—what he wrote about, what he brought so beautifully of life, wasn't only history and battles and causes and crusades—but the simple and the humble stuff they're made out of.

Steve could write an American classic like "The Devil and Daniel Webster"—but he could write stories like "Doc Melhorne at the Pearly Gates," and "Glamour," and "Too Early Spring"—stories about integrity, about such things as kindness and bewilderment, about youth and love and heartbreak. I am particularly fond of those stories, because in them he caught something about America that's different from any other country. Some quality of youth and hopefulness that is above all American; something about a spring rain in the city, or the feeling of a November evening, that could only be here, in this country. Something in the dreams and sorrows of young people in love, something in the humor, in the simple stubbornness of a country doctor, that doesn't belong anywhere else.

He loved America the way he loved people—not with the oratorical flourish of a Whitman, not with the placid sentimentality of a Longfellow—but the way he was himself, critical, but patient, full of curiosity, hard headed, but quick to forgive. I've never known anyone who loved the human race more than he did, and was more out of patience with it, and forgave it more often, and more generously. Not that he was over sociable, or liked to have many people around him—or even thought them a noble kind of animal. He wasn't fooled by them; he just had a lot of affection for them, even though they didn't always deserve it—and even though he knew it. He had no bitterness, though he had clean anger—often, and readily. He could write his ode to the Austrian Socialists, with its quiet indignation,

"Bring no flowers here,  
Neither of mountain nor valley,  
Nor even the common flowers of the  
waste field

That still are free to the poor . . ."

He could write his poems to Rosemary—which for their quality of morning joy, of tenderness and delight, of innocence and aching youth, have never been equalled, to my mind, by any poet.

And he could write to me in a letter, in 1942, "Well, dammit, I am for more seagulls and fewer bombs, but it will be a long time till we get there. Meanwhile, I write a great deal about freedom and democracy and things—but there has to be mortal love, or what's the use."

Mortal love—in a way, that was the measure of the man. And in a way, it was his measure of America—what he brought to it, and what he asked of it: that it should be a land of mortal love—not of great phrases, though he, too, could make great phrases—not of great names, but of small names, too; not a land for big people only, but for little ones—where the swift child, the country doctor, the Jew, and the sparrow could all be happy—and secure. He would have had it so, if he could; and perhaps, because of him, and others like him, some day it will be.

In these iron times, he gave all of himself there was to give, he didn't hold back. If an eagle was needed, he would be that eagle; and so to many of us, he was. But to himself, he was still the sparrow, small, joyous, impudent—"yet how he lives, and how he loves in living."

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No American poet of the Twentieth Century has spoken as well for our country and our people as Stephen Benet. Writing in a period of flippancy and cynicism, he asserted powerfully the ideals which made up the American heritage, and therefore stood high above nearly all his contemporaries.

Glenn Hughes

# This Was an American

(Stephen Vincent Benet: 1898-1943)

Charles J. Quirk, S. J.

You have written well of your land and  
its people,  
Mr. Benet, both in prose and in poetry;  
And this must be of the greatest satisfaction to you  
In the peaceful Country in which you  
now reside.  
You have always loved everything that  
was really American:  
For you have told us that you fell in  
love with American names:  
"The sharp names that never get fat,  
The snakeskin-titles of mining claims,  
The plumed war-bonnet of Medicine  
Hat,  
Tuscon and Deadwood and Lost Mule  
Flat."  
And you have narrated with verve and  
gusto  
The brave story in epic form of Americans  
In our own Civil War—  
America's first great Epic that!  
Then your tale couched in folk-lore  
strain  
Of Daniel Webster's bout with the  
Devil,  
And how he chased the Fiend from the  
state of New Hampshire;  
Daniel Webster whose "smile was like  
sunrise over Monadnock,"  
And whose "brow could be dark as a  
thundercloud"—  
Is something of which we can always  
be proud,  
So thoroughly American is it.  
And when the Second World War came  
upon us  
You spoke trumpet-wise  
For the little men of America  
Who were fighting for her life and for  
her freedom.  
Now finally, we have your latest effort,  
Your unfinished poem-story  
Of the beginnings of our beloved country:

Western Star shines brightly today  
In the murk of War,  
And is the silver imprimatur of your  
undying devotion  
To the dear land you and all of us love  
so much.  
May your soul rest in peace, Stephen  
Benet,  
And may the spirit of your work  
Shine crystal-clear to all Americans—  
forever!

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## A VOICE THAT CANNOT BE REPLACED

Struthers Burt

Anyone who knew Steve Benet could resist no opportunity to praise him and regret him; he was one of the finest men I knew and one of the finest Americans, and his loss is tremendous at this especial moment, and will be equally so in the peace to come. There are certain voices—not many in any generation, but a few—that once stilled, cannot be replaced; and Steve Benet was one of those rare voices; so lucid, so native, and so understanding both of men and women, and of the country to which he belonged.

The last time I saw him was over a year ago in the office of the Council for Democracy in New York, and he was an ill man then, but he made no mention of this, and was as quietly amusing and interested as ever, working as always for America and the faith it represents. He was a great democrat of the great tradition—the tradition of Lincoln and Jefferson and countless other great Americans. Just to talk to him was a lesson in modesty, in wit, in imagination—and a rebuke to pretence and to selfish pride and stupid thinking.



# A Chat With Stephen Vincent Benet

Cyril Clemens

One late October afternoon just after returning from a month spent in beautiful Bermuda, I rang the bell at 220 East Sixty-Ninth Street to have it opened by a very tall, middle-aged frail looking man wearing heavy tortoiseshell glasses and inclined to baldness. His eyes were steady, his voice somewhat high-pitched but not at all like Shelley's "obnoxious squeak." There seemed little out of the ordinary about him except his hands so beautifully shaped that one put him down at once as artist or poet. Slightly stooped he had a way of holding his head inclined to one side that indicated two qualities often not combined in one person—humility and power. In his quiet way he made a pronounced impression upon the observer.

After cordially shaking hands, Stephen Vincent Benet—for it was he—led the way down a darkish corridor to a sort of back parlor. The stone mantel, old-fashioned wall paper, and horsehair furniture dating from the mid-Victorian period proved exceedingly restful as a background for conversation—after the bustle and confusion of Manhattan's city streets.

The poet motioned me to a seat with an easy gesture of his fine hands,

"So you have been down 'in the still-vexed Bermoothes'? Those islands always possessed a strong fascination for one because of their Shakespearean association. Only recently I have been rereading *The Tempest* which in my opinion contains some of the finest passages in all Shakespeare. Who doesn't know by heart,

"'We are such stuff as dreams are made on  
And our little life—'

"I once read with considerable interest William Strachey's *Historie of Travaile into Virginia Britania* published

about 1612, a few years after the author had been shipwrecked in the Bermudas. This book had an extensive circulation as everything about the New World invariably did in Jacobean London. Shakespeare probably read it, or if he didn't, he must have heard the story of Bermuda from some of the returned sailors. For in those days news was bruited about very fast. Did you see the actual cave that is described in the *Tempest*?"

"Yes," I answered, "I made a special point of visiting it and I found Shakespeare's account wonderfully accurate for one who had depended upon second or third hand for his information. I recall that the presiding genius of the place was a little red-faced bewhiskered Puckish man who endeavored (rather unsuccessfully, I must confess) to impress us visitors with his fierceness. I kept thinking what a perfect take-off of Caliban he would have made if Gilbert and Sullivan had parodied the play! It may interest you to know that my late friend A. E. Housman of Cambridge was also a great admirer of the *Tempest*."

"That reminds me," returned Benet, "that when I was a student at Yale I read and memorized considerable portions of *A Shropshire Lad*. I recall actually writing the poet and asking him if he would recommend any book on versification. His answer written in his beautiful precise penmanship, I can still recall verbatim.

"'Do not read books about versification; no poet ever learnt it that way. If you are going to be a poet, it will come to you naturally and you will pick up all you need to know from reading poetry.'

"Upon the appearance of *The Name and Nature of Poetry* in 1933, I read it several times. You recall that when

asked to define poetry Housman answered, that he could no more define poetry than a terrier could a rat!"

Soon Mr. Benet was discussing Chesterton,

"I first began to read him when in my teens and even at that time it puzzled me how little his verse was known in comparison with other modern poets—for the most part of much smaller calibre. Few of his contemporaries could achieve such stirring lines as,

"When all my days are ending  
And I have no songs to sing,  
I think I shall not be too old  
To stare at everything  
As I stared at a nursery floor  
Or a tall tree and a swing—'  
That truly is in the grand style!"

After handing me a cup of tea and an English seedcake, the poet continued,

"The White Horse' and 'The Battle of Lepanto' in my opinion are among the very finest of all modern ballads; they keep up their high quality throughout and are altogether glorious. If I had written them, I certainly wouldn't worry about being remembered after my death!

"Among American poets definitely influenced by Chesterton was Vachel Lindsay. For instance, it is not difficult to detect the echo of 'Lepanto' in General William Booth,'

"Dim drums throbbing in the hills half heard'

'Booth led boldly with his big bass drum.'

"Lindsay had an extraordinary mental grasp of the folk tunes of American speech — camp meetings, soap-box, tramp, and so on—but they never broke through into his own verse until after he had read and digested the verse of Chesterton. In fact, my own 'Drug Shop or Endymion in Edmonstoun,' which I wrote while still a student owes much to the 'White Horse.' If it hadn't been for this, the stirring 'Lepanto', and other G. K. pieces which I find myself rereading every chance possible, many of my own poems, I am convinced, would be far less effectively written."

"Another stanza of Chesterton's I often find myself repeating is,

'Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes

To roar to the resounding plain,  
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes  
For God himself is born again.'

"You frequently hear it stated that Chesterton was unique, and he never inspired others. At least in Lindsay's case and mine it was not so, and I shall always be grateful to him.

"Chesterton's method is to take some belief that everybody accepts as true, turn it upside down or inside out, and then prove that his manipulation of it accords with reality. You recall perhaps that in writing on Byron he starts with the commonly held assumption of the poet's skepticism and melancholy and then proceeds somewhat in this fashion,

"Byron's love of the desolate and inhuman in nature was not the mark of scepticism and depression. When a young man can elect deliberately to walk alone in winter by the side of the shattering sea, when he takes pleasure in storms and stricken peaks, we may conclude with the certainty of logic that he is very young and very happy. There is a certain darkness which we see in wine when seen in shadow; we see it again in the night which has just buried a gorgeous sunset. The wine seems black, and yet at the same time powerfully and almost impossibly red; the sky seems black, and yet at the same time to be only too dense a blend of purple and green. Such was the darkness that lay around Byron. Darkness with him was only too dense a purple. He would prefer the sullen hostility of the earth because amid all the cold and darkness his own heart was flaming like his own fireside."

When I spoke of his **John Brown's Body** as a distinct contribution to American folklore, Benet answered,

"Folklore has long attracted me. Folk tales, songs, proverbs, beliefs and customs, always held my keenest interest. I early became interested in the folk stories that centered around Davy

Crockett the frontiersman, Paul Bunyan the gargantuan lumberjack, and many other real or semi-mythical characters that were supposed to flourish just before the Civil War. I have always been interested in determining whether like customs in widely separated groups originated independently or had a common origin."

"What is your opinion of folk songs, Mr. Benet?"

"Well, my feeling is that folk songs are rarely more than melodies, are always anonymous, and are transmitted orally from generation to generation, undergoing various changes as they are passed along. Folk music is often extremely fine in quality—not only the Negro contribution, but also that which derives from old English sources such as the mountaineers of Kentucky and Tennessee."

After we had talked a while about the First World War, Benet told of his participation in it.

"When our country entered the war, April, 1917, I was a student at Yale and simply crazy to enlist. But my eyesight was so bad that I had to wear double-lensed glasses. I shamefully imposed upon the examining doctors by memorizing the oculist's chart and all unsuspecting they actually passed me. A day or two later I began my army career at Fort Monroe. I was assigned the job of peeling potatoes. But such was my near-sightedness that I had to hold the potato a few inches from my eyes. Making what progress I could I became conscious of a lieutenant standing nearby, eying me rather narrowly. Finally he strolled up, patted me on the shoulder, and said,

"'Either you have never seen a potato before, or you are practically blind. Better come with me to the Colonel.'

"Then, of course, it was all up with me as far as the army was concerned, and the very next morning I received my honorable discharge and my four

happy days as a soldier receded into the past. I took it pretty hard, for all my college friends were enlisting, and the army had been bred in my very bones. My father Colonel James Walker Benet had won real distinction in the ordnance department and most of my childhood had been spent at various army posts. Although denied the privilege of serving my country as a soldier I have endeavored to keep up my army connections. All my children have been baptized at the West Point Chapel and for some years now I have been giving an annual lecture at the Military Academy on **John Brown's Body**. The alert young cadets always make a splendid audience and it is certainly an inspiration to address them."

Shortly before leaving I asked Benet what poets he had been reading lately.

"Of late I have been rereading some of Coventry Patmore, a member, as you recall, of the Pre-Raphaelite group and a frequent contributor to its journal, **The Germ**. His outstanding characteristic was well hit-off in the subtitle of Sir Edmund Gosse's fine biography 'The Laureate of Wedded Love.' **The Angel in the House** has always been one of my favorites. I agree with Patmore that human love, instead of being an obstacle to divine love should become a beautiful and wholesome approach to supernatural experience. I admire his delicate thought, his copious, fervent, yet wonderfully restrained emotion and his word music always splendid and varied. Perhaps you recall those stirring lines from his poem entitled 'Peace'?"

And Benet proceeded to recite from memory as he showed me to the front door,

"The sunshine dreaming upon Salmon's height

Is not so sweet and white  
As the most heretofore sin-spotted Soul  
That darts to its delight  
Straight from the absolution of a faithful fight."

# Recollections of Steve Benet

Thomas Caldecot Chubb

How to set down Stephen Benet in a few paragraphs? How to sketch a life-like picture of the fine American, the excellent poet, the generous friend?

I could begin by remembering the first time I saw him twenty-seven years ago—he a tall, apple-faced, nearsighted young writer just turned nineteen, myself but seventeen. But the things I remember are so trivial. Is the portrait there?

It was in the first year of World War I, and the scene was the little rugged island of Vinal Haven set in blue fog wreathed waters off Maine's coast. He had already taken his first flight; had—so I was told—published his first book of poems; seen a stirring poem that he had written appear in the *New Republic* and a long ballad in *Century Illustrated*, too!

But I was too shy—or perhaps too proud—to talk to him of poetry, and so what comes into my mind is that we had both come to that summer place without a bathing suit, and that because the local store had only one variety, we had both appeared at the rocky swimming pool (a narrow inlet with a tide gate so that the sun could warm the cold Maine water held back there) in a similar very incongruous affair. It was a black cotton one-piece suit but with a wide flap that made it look like a two-piece one and with, about the midriff, a flamboyant and brilliant orange band.

Thus bedizened, we splashed the pool's length on opposing relay teams and then sat in the sunlight out of breath. I still have in my possession a very tarnished and a very knobbly silver penknife. To the best of my belief and knowledge, it is the only prize I ever won in a contest with Steve Benet.

Or I could remember another meeting

two years later. This time I was a freshman at Yale.

John Farrar—or perhaps it was Alfred Bellinger—had gathered together a small group, and once a month—we were five only—we met at the Lizzie Club and filing past the comfortable living room with its overstuffed brown leather chairs and sofa, its open fire, and its grave handsome portrait of Queen Elizabeth, we moved on to a small upper room where each of us read a poem that he had written—one only—and waited for the comments of the others.

There was in the group one who was an actor too, with a fine sonorous voice, and with a gift for composing long monologues about Moses or Judas Macabaeus in a reverberent blank verse that was far more organ-like than lucid or clear. He read one of these one day, and Steve listened attentively with his round head tilted to one side.

"I wish I could write something like that," he said, and meant it.

Then he fished out of his pocket a crumpled bit of paper.

"Slowly blanch-handed Dawn," he began. I have not the poem here, and cannot, therefore, set it down in all its compact effectiveness or even be quite sure that I remember it. Perhaps a dozen lines, in a voice rasping and yet not unpleasing. "Then to the crowing of a thousand cocks poured forth on earth the unconquerable sun."

It was the opening passage from the first of his two visions of Helen, and it was the first time that I had heard really great poetry read by the man who had written it. I could say nothing. None of us could say anything. For after that sheer outburst of untrammelled lyricism there was nothing we could say.

Or there was an encounter in Paris

not far from the Deux Magots facing St. Germain des Pres. It was in that long time ago when everybody lived for at least a little part of his life among the crooked medieval streets of the Rive Gauche, and the Gestapo was a name not one of us had ever heard. The month was November, and the damp autumn air was pungent with the smell of roasting chestnuts. Yellow leaves zigzagged from the trees and clung to a wet pavement.

Steve had some errands to do and he and I rode for a half hour or so in one of Paris's plaintive-voiced taxis. He told me what he was doing. He was living at Neuilly and was writing a long poem. A long poem about the Civil War.

Do you know what I thought? I should perhaps say that at this period of life Steve was just emerging from some years of potboiling, having written a sentimental if vivid novel made to order to run serially between the advertisements in a ladies magazine and also half a hundred made to order stories.

I thought: "It's too bad Steve has never lived up to our incredible belief in him." I thought in the same mood: "A long poem about the Civil War!"

My hopes, I must confess, were not exactly sanguine. A year later, or perhaps eighteen months later, I picked up **John Brown's Body** in a bookstore in New Bedford. I began slowly and then read faster and faster. After that, I read it once again. Nor has there been a year since then in which I have not read and then reread its stirring passages. I wonder if there is any lover of American poetry who has not done the same.

But it was my last encounter with Steve Benet that I like to remember best of all. It was born of a moment's impulse on an idle afternoon. I was at loose ends one day and I went into a telephone booth and dialed his number. Steve answered. No, he was not busy. Yes, he would be glad to have me drop in.

Very shortly thereafter I was in one of two comfortable chairs in a room overflowing with books in his home on 69th Street. Steve talked. He talked well and easily with his dry humorous voice. And he did not talk of himself.

Yes, under prodding he said a few words about **Western Star** which he had begun even then, and which even then somehow I did not feel he ever expected to finish. But that was all.

Instead he talked stimulatingly of almost everything else. He talked of a detective story that a mutual acquaintance had written. It was not much of a book, but he found something good about it—something really good—to separate from much trashiness for praise. He discussed James Joyce's **Work in Progress** (later **Finnegan's Wake**) and justified—I am not sure how seriously—its extraordinary technique. It would even be permissible, he said, to string, as on a necklace, pure sounds, if the sounds were effective. Then he spoke to me—and for me it was an introduction—of the work of Donald Culross Peattie.

He spoke because of a question I had asked. At that time I was tremendously interested in the wild turkey, living seven months of each year in a place reputed to have the greatest concentration of the American bird of any place in the land. Who could tell me something about the turkey? I asked.

"Why don't you write Peattie?" he suggested.

Then he began telling about Peattie and his work with such persuasive eloquence that I felt cheated because to that moment, I had not read anything that Peattie had written. He and Steve were lovers of the same thing (as I soon found out for I soon devoured every book that Peattie had published) but they were in no way rivals. They were partners in excellence—Steve the greater of the two but Peattie knowing many things that Steve could never know. They were equal lovers—and equal celebrants—of the American dream.

Presently a footstep was heard, and a tall girl was at the door.

"Daddy, can I have a lollipop?"

"Yes," he said.

Suddenly she saw a stranger in the room and disappeared—almost like Alice down the rabbit-hole—in teen-aged embarrassment.

Then there was another footstep, and a boy. And another footstep and a small girl. Each time the same question, the same answer, the same surprise at the presence of a stranger, the same retreat before an adult intruder. And later the return for formal introduction gravely carried off.

Amused at my puzzlement—for my own children were still five years in the future—Steve told me this entertaining anecdote.

"I work in the front room," he said pointing. "The one with a glass door. One day I was trying to finish a story when I looked up and saw my son with his nose pressed against the door. I motioned him to go away, saying that I was working.

"But, daddy, I want to watch you work."

"Well, I'm not really working. I'm thinking."

"Well, I want to watch you think."

That was my last talk with Steve Benet, but it was not the last time I saw him. During the eight years that followed the writer of an American epic developed surely into the writer of fine American stories; then into the fighter against the night that seemed very likely to engulf us, a fighter against the dragon-seed crop of the dictators, against the resurgence of a barbarian world. But in that time our paths did not cross. I listened to his plays on the radio; read his poems—*Litany for Dictators* and all his various *Nightmares*—read some of his stories, and sometimes heard about him from friends.

Then one day in the Fall of 1942 I was walking down Fifth Avenue when

I passed him going the other way. That is I thought I passed him, and realized that it was someone else. For the man I saw was so obviously ill, so bent and worn that it could not possibly be the young poet who had swum with me in Maine a quarter of a century ago, it could not even be the man I sat with in New York. So I did not speak to him, for I did not want the embarrassment of speaking by mistake to a stranger.

Hardly six months later I picked up a paper in Washington and saw that he was dead. I learned then of his struggle with a painful illness, and of his resolution not to yield to it but to continue since his words were the only weapons he could wield for his country. And of how he did continue and how thus he died. And I then realized who it was that I had seen.

Now that your ballad is ended, Steve Benet,

I write this poem in memory of you,  
Who as American were as Georgia clay  
Or Plymouth Rock, American as the blue

Strident voiced jaybird that flashes  
through the chill air

When flames on valley and hill Connecticut Fall,

And now is here and now is everywhere,  
As cardinal's whistle, as Maine lake's  
wild loon call;

And who with Lincoln's tenderness and salt,

With Tom Paine's fervor, Washington's integrity,

And with Dan Webster's fine words that exalt,

Struck your harp strings and made strong poetry

Of the American people, lean, clear-eyed,

Practical yet altruistic, shrewd, home-spun,

And of our land that stretches far and wide,

A continent, from rising to setting sun.



# Benet's Sympathetic Understanding

Prof. Carl Becker

I am very glad to express my great admiration for Stephen Vincent Benet, both as a writer and as a man. I did not, unfortunately, know Mr. Benet personally; but I read his writings with delight, and it seemed to me that through his writing I could discern the man. And what I liked about him and his writings was that he seemed never to have lost faith in the U. S. A., or in the common people who make it what it is.

During his lifetime American literature emancipated itself, as one may say, from two artificial limitations. One of these was the notion, surviving from colonial times, that literature could flourish only in mature civilization, and that American writers could best achieve distinction by adhering to foreign, especially English, models. The other limitation was imposed by the moral and ethical conventions of the Victorian age which, as it was supposed, prevented writers, even English writers, from disclosing freely certain aspects of life, notably those having to do with sexual relations. From these two limitations American writers of Mr. Benet's generation emancipated themselves with complete success and immense gusto. That was all to the good. But I get the impression that many American writers felt that since it wasn't necessary to copy foreign writers, it wasn't necessary to know what they were doing; and that since the Victorian writers were defective in certain respects it wasn't necessary to bother about them in any respect. The unfortunate result of this was that, aiming to emancipate themselves from one sort of provincialism, too many writers exhibited another and worse one—the provincialism of these who know very little about the history and literature of the world outside the confines of the United States or before the

year 1900.

Stephen Vincent Benet was not one of these. He knew American history and American literature. He was fully aware that there are serious defects in American civilization, and that American literature exhibits defects and limitations inseparable from the conditions under which it has been produced. But he did not fall into the error of supposing that because the ideals of democracy are not fully realized those ideals are to be dismissed as disingenuous and hypocritical, or that because American writers before 1900 were not free to discuss certain aspects of life they were therefore stuffed shirts, or that because the common people are unsophisticated they are therefore ignorant boobs. The essential merit of Stephen Vincent Benet was this—that he employed his great talents in the effort to portray with sympathetic understanding the virtues and frailties of men, rather than to show up with a superior condescension their stupidities.

## YALE'S PRESIDENT PAYS TRIBUTE

I am very happy to have this occasion to pay a tribute to Stephen Vincent Benet. As an undergraduate he already gave clear evidence of literary genius. He also showed a quality almost as rare as genius in his personal modesty which permitted him to bring alike to faculty and his fellow undergraduates the feeling of his own inspiring qualities without making them feel in any way inferior. He made a deep impression upon Yale, both faculty and student body, and because of his influence a real revolution was accomplished on the Yale Campus, the effects of which are still visible. He inspired the students to deep appreciation of literary and spiritual values.

Charles Seymour

## A Page of Tributes to Benet

I suggest that you use the dedication to my **Home Front Memo** for the symposium in the poet's honor:

Stephen Vincent Benet knew the distinction between pure art and propaganda in the written or spoken word. He could sing to give men music, consolation, pleasure. He could intone chant or prayer pointing the need for men to act. He illustrated the code and creed of those writers who seek to widen the areas of freedom for all men, knowing that men of ideas vanish first when freedom vanishes. He saw that a writer's silence on living issues can in itself constitute a propaganda of conduct leading toward the deterioration or death of freedom. He wrote often hoping that men would act because of his words. He could have been Olympian, whimsical, seeking to timelessness amid bells of doom not to be put off.

Carl Sandburg

\* \* \*

Surprisingly enough I did not know Steve Benet very well. I was in his company but a few times, and then had little conversation directly with him. I am sorry that this is so, for I greatly admired him, and I wish I could now enjoy a richer memory of him than circumstances ever permitted me to have.

I can say this of him, however. He was witty. Every time I did see him he impressed me by the shrewdness and sharpness of his criticism—which spared nothing and nobody, though it was never malicious. It was just, and therefore rightly feared by fools and rogues. He was good-natured and amusing, he was charitable. But he also had this mordant wit. It was the final stroke, I think, in a valuable character.

Mark Van Doren.

I always thought very highly of Stephen Vincent Benet, but then, I believe everyone writing in the book trade did. He was first and foremost an American writer, and by that I do not mean that he was in any way limited. But he sang and wrote America, our country was always manifest in his work, he knew its pulse and its heart, and they are in everything he wrote. And I need not speak at all of his great humanity; the way in which he worked against the oppressors, the unjust, the international gangsters, speaks most eloquently for itself. His loss is a great one to American letters.

August Derleth

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My personal indebtedness to Stephen Benet grows out of the pleasure I find in reading, and rereading John Brown's Body, and a beautiful and appealing short poem "A Mountain Whipporwill." I often read the story of the mountain boy fiddler to my children.

John A. Lomax

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I look with great pride on the former presence of S. V. Benet in my class in Organic Evolution. He sat in the front row, for the class was seated alphabetically, and was one of the few out of a large group who made a lasting impression on me. I remember how beautifully phrased his ten minute test papers were and in contrast the occasional paucity of scientific fact which characterised them at times. But whatever the mark on the scale of ten the brief essays were always a delight and were prophetic of the writer's growing skill in literary work.

Prof. Richard Swann Lull

# Benet and Prevention of Cruelty to Speakers

Prof. Frank Luther Mott

I am afraid I shall not be able to give dates in this chronicle, but I recall distinctly Steve Benet's connection with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Speakers at Iowa City.

The S. P. C. S. was organized as an auxiliary of the Times Club. The Times Club was a group with a membership limited to three hundred which invited half a dozen lecturers every year to speak to it. These lecturers were less professional platform men than interesting persons who were doing interesting and significant things.

When Christopher Morley was in Iowa City some ten or twelve years ago, Grant Wood, Clyde Hart and one or two others decided that there was no suitable place to get together for an informal, unacademic and reasonably noisy celebration. We found a room over a restaurant downtown, far enough from the sanctity of any halls of learning, and fitted it up in what Grant was wont to call "the worst style of the late Victorian period." Here were the ingrain carpets, the flowered wallpaper, the hair ornaments and handworked mottos on the walls, the red plush sofas, the marble-topped center-table with its burden of bric-a-brac, including the plush album with family photographs, and the cabinet organ, and all that meant "parlor" to those of us who were small boys in the beautiful but stuffy nineties.

To this retreat we brought many friends and visitors to the campus and town. They appeared to enjoy our parties and the members of S. P. C. S. found them truly delightful and memorable experiences.

Steve Benet visited Iowa City a number of times and enjoyed the hospitality of S. P. C. S. One evening we had the

photographer in our group take a picture of him in a costume which we fondly imagined was of the late Victorian period. We put sideburns on him and gave him one of those ties which I remember we, as boys, used to call "dirty-shirt ties" because they covered up so much. A "diamond" wishbone tie-pin served to hold it together. Someway, Benet was in this costume just as much as he was without it. The same poet's eyes and mouth, and the same Steve Benet expression.

He sang with us the songs of the nineties and contributed to our informal program. Some of our members, such as Paul Engle, had known him well before his visit to S. P. C. S., but afterward we felt we all knew him well. He was never one to "put on a front."

Other Iowans knew Benet a good deal better than I did, but none respected him more or cared more for his work. Perhaps this little sidelight on a great poet and short story writer as a "good fellow" with a midwestern group may interest some of the many who loved him.

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Stephen Vincent Benet was a great story teller. His tale "The Devil and Daniel Webster" will, I believe, become part of our folk-lore. His narrative poem "John Brown's Body" is a magnificent story of the Civil War. Perhaps Benet will be longest remembered for these two works, but all people who are fighting Fascism know that Stephen Vincent Benet was one of the earliest and most eloquent men who saw the danger facing the world while Hitler and Mussolini were protesting their peaceful intentions. Benet died young but his flaming words will continue to inspire us.

Henry A. Wallace

## AS BROTHERS ARE REMEMBERED

(for Stephen Vincent Benet)

Joseph Joel Keith

He will be remembered as lovers are remembered:

He wrote a great, free love song for a need;

For a love new-grown, for hearts that bleed.

He will be remembered as prophets are remembered:

He wrote a great, free warning for the blind

Like a great, warm spring, he opened his mind.

He will be remembered as fighters are remembered:

He wrote a great, free anger for the foe;

Like a great, hot flame, he penned the blow.

He will be remembered as brothers are remembered:

He wrote a great, free message for his land;

As the whole world's kin, he stretched his hand.

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The epic age has not yet passed. As long as frontiers or conquests remain in earth and air and sky, there will be songs to sing of arms and of heroes. Stephen Vincent Benet has been most sensitive among American writers to the wealth of epic matter in the Americas. His mastery of this rich lore has made *John Brown's Body* a classic. In *Western Star*, he enlarges his scenes and extends his boundaries. He looks backwards to the first restless stirring among English lads of adventures and sea fever and forward to the "Star in the West, fool's silver of the sky,

Desolate lamp above the mountain-pass  
Where the trail falters and the oxen die,  
Spiked planet on the prairie of wild grass,

Flower of frost, flower of rock and ice,  
Red flower over the blood sacrifices."

The chimera, John Smith, Dickon Heron, Matthew and Rose and Kath-

erine Lanyard and all their attendant throngs move through his unresting world, shuttlelike, weaving into the patterned warp of America, the woof of personality. This last book of America's beloved poet is a legacy of song and an epic of the western world.

Sister M. Madeleva

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Your project of a symposium for Stephen Benet is admirable. I have a definite recollection of him as he was in my division in Freshman History during 1916-1917—his slight boyish figure, his eager alert face, his brilliant brain, his vivid interest in the course. I have checked with the Registrar's office to see if his performance with me measured up to my recollection. It did. I gave him 3:40 for the first term and 3:50 for the second, that is, 3:40 for the year, well up in the Philosophical division. I remember attending the De Forest (or Ten Eyck) prize speaking contest, merely to listen to him. I do not recall speaking to him inside or outside the class room except when once I asked him if his ancestry was French and he replied that it was Spanish. I recall no answer that he made in discussion in class; just this impression that I have tried to describe of a modest, attractive, and able personality. All this is absolutely the truth and my comments are not influenced by his later distinguished career.

Prof. Sydney K. Mitchell

## THE HOURGLASS

(Dedicated to S. V. Benet)

James Ross Clemens

Here Time tells time by its own dust,  
Each grain of sand a moment's death;  
No stay nor rest, but run it must,  
As hard occasion ordereth.  
Yet, if put to right use, the while  
At spectacle one cries, "alas,"  
As sand downpours on mounting pile,  
Salvation dwells within the glass.

# The Aborigine in Australian Fiction

Dr. Bruce Sutherland

When Mark Twain visited Australia in the fall of 1895 he was not in eruption. Even a series of painful carbuncles did not provoke him to say or do anything of a caustic nature. His awareness of Australian sensitivity may have curbed his tongue and pen. "One must say it very softly," he confided to his notebook, "but the truth is that the native Australian is as vain of his unpretty country as if it were the final masterpiece of God, achieved by Him from designs by that Australian." Whatever the reason, his comments in general were exceedingly polite. But if they were not caustic neither were they overly enthusiastic. All that he could find to say about the literature was mild enough. "Australia," he remarked, "is fertile in writers whose books are faithful mirrors of the life of the country and of its history." On one subject only did Mark Twain become eloquent, and that was the aborigine and aboriginal life.

It was not his good fortune ever to meet an Australian aborigine. All that he came to know of these remarkable people he learned from reading books and talking to "old settlers." From this second hand information he concluded that their accomplishments were little short of miraculous and decided that only race aversion had caused these "unapproachable trackers and boomerangers and weet-weetters" to be given the low rate intellectual reputation which has "this long time (been) the world's estimate of them." Mark Twain held out no hope for the survival of the Australian native "in the body." He did believe however, that there were native features which would be made to live forever in the literature of Australia. He had no living writer, no written work, in mind when he expressed

this belief. Fenimore Cooper, he wrote, "would have known how to value these people. He wouldn't have traded the dullest of them for the brightest Mohawk ever invented."

Much was known about the Australian aborigine in the 1890's and many scientific papers had been published, but not until 1899 did the first definitive work from an anthropological point of view appear. Spencer and Gillen's *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*, later revised and republished as *The Arunta*, 2 v., 1927, remains one of the finest studies of its kind ever printed. This, along with other works of scientific observation, provides a storehouse of information about the Australian native for the literary man or woman who chooses to use it. Nearly fifty years have passed since Mark Twain expressed his faith in the aborigine as a literary subject yet no Australian Fenimore Cooper or his modern counterpart has appeared upon the scene.

There have been, however, many literary treatments of the Australian native. Since the beginning the aborigine has been present in Australian fiction. In early works he was treated as a marauding savage whose interference with white settlement was not to be tolerated. Henry Kingsley, who knew better, viewed the native in this light. A classic example of this early treatment of the subject may be found in Charles De Boos' *Settler and Savage*, which was first published in 1867. The action, which occurs in the Hunter River district, follows the usual formula. Massacre by the blacks brings on the terrible vengeance of the whites who exterminate a whole tribe of their enemies. A more mature treatment of this theme is to be found in Mrs. Praed's sketches of early pioneer days in Queensland,

**Australian Life: Black and White**, 1885; sketches hailed by Mark Twain as "informing pictures of the early struggles of the white and black to reform each other." One of the first authors to make an effort to understand the native tribes was Hume Nisbet, a Scottish artist who wandered all over Australia. He had his own views concerning the treatment of the natives by the whites, views which were strongly expressed in three romances, **The Land of the Hibiscus Blossom**, 1888; **The Savage Queen**, 1891; and, **A Bush Girl's Romance**, 1894. These novels range in scene from Tasmania to Western Australia. They are interesting but not of any great literary significance.

The twentieth century has seen a more serious effort on the part of writers of fiction to understand the aborigine and to present him in his own environment. There is some recognition of the fact that there is an aboriginal culture with an individuality of its own and that it is a law unto itself. **The Little Black Princess**, 1905, and **We of the Never Never**, 1908, by Mrs. Aeneas Gunn are experiences from real life in the Northern Territory and many native customs and ceremonies are explained with sympathy and understanding. **The Incredible Journey**, 1923, by Catherine E. M. Martin is a human if unrealistic account of the power of mother love which drives a native woman to go against custom in order to recover her son. E. L. G. Watson's stories as published in **Innocent Desires**, 1924, treat of the relationship between white men and native women in the upper part of Western Australia. James Devaney's **The Vanished Tribes**, 1929, is a series of tales of the social life and legendary history of the aborigines prior to the coming of the whites to the Queensland region. Other recent novels of some significance are **Winjan's People**, 1933, by Jesse E. Hammond, written against a background of southwest Australia; C. H. Sayce's **Comboman**,

1934, on native life in central Australia; J. J. Hardie's **Pastoral Symphony**, 1939, and Eleanor Dark's **The Timeless Land**, 1941, an historical novel of the first settlement.

Although no truly great novel of the Australian aborigine has yet appeared there are three which deserve more than passing notice. The first is **Coonardoo**, 1929, by Katharine Susannah Prichard. The story was written in the country through which it moves, the north western part of Western Australia, and while it is fiction it is not entirely a work of the imagination. To quote Miss Prichard, "People who only see the blacks along the trans-continental line or when they have become poor, degraded and degenerate creatures, as a result of contact with towns and the vices of white people, cannot understand how different they are in their natural state, or on isolated stations of the Nor'-West where they are treated with consideration and kindness." **Coonardoo** is a tragedy laid against a background of immensity and loneliness. It is a story of individual human relationships that are complicated by the conflict of cultures. This is no ordinary treatment of a common problem. No effort is made to draw any broad socially significant conclusions. The characters, both native and white, are individuals and their reactions to the circumstances which confront them are personal. Coonardoo the native girl has known from childhood that she must take care of her playmate, Hugh Watt. This she attempts to do with all the fidelity of her character through his young manhood and maturity. Her feeling for him is not love in the western sense of the term—she is a native woman true to her tribal training. The white man, Hugh, whose moral cowardice is his great weakness, in the end destroys Coonardoo and himself because of his inhibitions and his limited understanding. Not with deliberate intent, but in the natural course of human



events the native character emerges as superior to the white. Miss Prichard's descriptions of aboriginal customs and manners are accurate and since they are factors in the formation of native personality and philosophy they are necessary to an understanding of native character. This work won the *Bulletin* prize as the best Australian novel for 1928.

William Hatfield's *Desert Saga*, 1933 although in the romantic tradition, gives a clear cut picture of native life in the Alice Springs region of central Australia. The chief character is Grungunja, the Arunta poet; his education, training, home and tribal life as described by Hatfield are anthropologically correct. His attempts to cope with white infiltration and the eventual compromise which is worked out by a medical anthropologist who understands native psychology provides a happy ending and a solution to the native problem. The natives are supported and allowed to continue their tribal life unmolested in return for a certain amount of labor. This solution unquestionably works in isolated instances but cannot be applied universally. Sixteen years of close association with the natives in conjunction with studies in anthropology have qualified Mr. Hatfield, whose real name is Ernest Chapman, to speak with some authority on the subject of the Australian aborigine, but knowledge and sympathy alone do not create great fiction.

*Capricornia*, 1938, by Xavier Herbert, published in the United States in 1943, is a powerful novel of miscegenation, with its attendant problems and injustices, as it is observable in the Darwin region of the Northern Territory. Herbert makes no attempt to conceal his personal indignation nor to tone down his account of the ineptitude, cruelty and blindness which has been the rule rather than the exception under white supremacy. Like Miss Prichard, Herbert believes that the Australian native

springs from the same racial background as the Caucasian and that the racial development was very early dissociated from Mongoloid and Negroid lines. Likewise he recognizes the high degree of intelligence and mechanical aptitude of the aborigine. His inference is that miscegenation carried to its logical conclusion would absorb the native tribes and that within three generations aboriginal pigmentation would disappear leaving a white race enriched by the accession of native blood. He points out that white Australian character has already absorbed much of the native philosophy toward life and that the indirect influence of the aborigine is much greater than is generally imagined, yet he sees no hope for an intelligent approach to the problem which a real commingling of the races would seem to solve. The greatness of this book lies in the fearlessness and honesty with which the author has faced a difficult cultural situation. Here is no sugar-coated palliative to life but large doses of the real thing as it appears on one of the last frontiers of the world.

The Australian aborigine as a subject is too vast for any one writer or any one literary work to cover all of the material satisfactorily. Competent novels have been written, some of them excellent in many ways, but a truly great work has yet to appear. With the progress that has been made in Australian fiction during the past fifteen years it is not too much to hope that Mark Twain's prophecy will come true and that some great work or collection of works will make the aborigine live forever in the literature of Australia.

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### JOY

Alice Hoey Shaffer

A bobolink or a little wren  
Can spread more cheer than a dozen  
men;  
And a mockingbird in a lemon tree  
Can make men's mirth absurdity.

# The Quarterly Recommends

Under the Bridge, by Ferris Greenslet. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

A distinguished publisher gives a fascinating account of the literary scene of his generation, especially T. B. Aldrich, Hamlin Garland, John Buchan, and Willa Cather.

Jan Smuts, by F. S. Crafford. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Co.

A scholarly and ably written biography of the great leader.

The Man of Alaska, by Thomas Jenkins, D. D. New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co.

A life of Peter Trimble Rowe, Episcopal Bishop of Alaska from 1895 to 1942 that is crowded with incident.

Randolph Bourne, by Louis Filler. Washington: American Council on Public Affairs.

A timely biography of a scholar who died in 1918, at the age of thirty-two with many lessons for us today.

Spain, by Salvador de Madariaga. New York: Creative Age Press.

The most thorough and unbiased account of Spain which has appeared since the Civil War commenced in 1936.

Daniel Carroll, A Frammer of the Constitution, by Sister Mary Virginia Geiger. Washington: Catholic University of America Press.

A scholarly presentation of a patriot who well deserves to be better remembered.

Lytton Strachey, by Max Beerbohm. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

A scintillating essay by a master of style.

This Man Ribbentrop, by Dr. Paul Schwarz. New York: Julian Messner Co.

A skillful and vivid presentation of one of Hitler's evil geniuses.

Charles J. Bonapart, by Eric F. Goldman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

A well presented account of Napoleon's kin who served as T. R.'s Secretary of the Navy.

Flower of Evil, by Edwin Morgan. New York: Sheed and Ward.

A stimulating, trenchantly written biography of Charles Baudelaire.

The Soul of a Queen, by Tryphosa

Bates-Batcheller. New York: Brentano's.

This fascinating fictionized biography of Louise Marie, Queen of Poland, brings to life a much neglected figure.

Such Confusion, by Agnes F. Byrne. Boston: Christopher Publishers.

Glimpses of history from 1700 to the present day by means of well selected anecdotes.

Five Negro Authors, by Prof. Mercer Cook. Washington: The Associated Publishers.

Scholarly accounts of Julian Raimond, Charles Bissette, Alexander Dumas, Auguste Lacassade, and Rene Maran.

Return to the Fountains, by John Paul Pritchard. Durham: Duke University Press.

The scope of this scholarly and well planned work is indicated by the sub-title, "Some classical sources of American criticism." Should be in all college libraries.

Rufus Wilmot Griswold, by Joy Bayless. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

This will remain the definitive biography of Poe's literary executor.

Collected Poems, by William Alexander Percy, with introduction by Roark Bradford. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

These beautiful poems deserve a lasting place in American literature.

A Dozen and One, by Jim Tully. Hollywood: Murray and Gee, Inc.

Tully's lively style introduces us to Charlie Chaplin, Clark Gable, Jack Dempsey, Diego Rivera, George J. Nathan, Wilson Mizner, Jim Cruze, Arnold Bennett, Tod Sloan, Paul Bern, Walter Winchell, Henry Armstrong, and H. L. Mencken.

Henry W. Grady, Spokesman of the New South, by Raymond B. Nixon. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

A masterly biography of the dynamic editor who died at thirty-nine.

Christopher Columbus, by S. G. Canoutas. New York: St. Mark's Printing Co.

An interesting attempt to prove the explorer a Greek nobleman.

The Coming Battle of Germany, by

William B. Ziff. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

A book that should be read by all Americans.

Lantern in the Wind, by Ethel Green Russell. Dallas: The Kaleidograph Press.

A collection of charming verse, musical and deftly written.

The Fifty Years of the Apostolic Delegation, by William Lallou. Paterson: St. Anthony Guild Press.

A well written and scholarly account of the Pope's official representatives in Washington from 1893 to 1943.

### FICTION

Taps for Private Tussie, by Jesse Stuart, illustrated by Thomas Benton. New York: E. P. Dutton, Inc.

A beautifully written idyl of the Kentucky mountain folk.

Against This Rock, by Louis Zara. New York: Creative Age Press.

A magnificent novel dealing with the life of Emperor Charles Fifth.

Twenty-Seven Stories, by Pearl S. Buck. Garden City: Sun Dial Press.

These stories show that the author is a master of the short story, in addition to the novel.

The Outside Leaf, by Ben Field. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock.

A powerful novel of a Jewish family in the tobacco raising section of Connecticut.

Modern American Short Stories, edited by Philip Van Doren Stern. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

An excellent selection.

Claudia, by Rose Franken. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

Pocket Book of War Humor, edited by Bennett A. Cerf. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

The cream of the war humor.

Twenty-five Short Stories, by Stephen Vincent Benet. New York: Sun Dial Press.

Collected for the first time with his brother's famous appreciation.

Behind That Curtain, by Earl Derr Biggers. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

A reprint of this famous detective classic published in 1928.

Red Harvest, by Dashiell Hammett. New York: Pocket Books, Inc.

Well worth reading.

### JUVENILES

O. Henry, by Jeannette Covert Nolan. New York: Julian Messner, Inc.

This pleasant retelling of William Sydney Porter's career can be enjoyed by both young and old.

Steamboat Bill and the Captain's Top Hat, by Irwin Shapiro. New York: Julian Messner Co.

A rollicking Mississippi yarn with excellent illustrations by Donald McKay.

Many Moons, by James Thurber. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co.

A modern fairy illustrated by Louis Slobodkin.

Somehow or other, though Bill Benet and his sister are old friends, I never met Stephen Vincent. But of course I knew his work and admired it. His was a well deserved popularity and one that will, in my estimation, outlast many present reputations. For his was work of a kind that did not merely win popularity by some accident, or by the devices of publicity, but was popular because of being addressed to the people, the sort of readers that are so often overlooked or are offered something less than the best of fare. Stephen Benet took them into his confidence and believed in them and in their America. I cannot imagine that the American people will forget him.

Theodore Maynard

I had—and have—the greatest admiration for S. V. Benet. In fact I believe that he is one of the writers future generations will consider as masters of American literature. He was a great poet and a great American—just as American as Whitman or Mark Twain. And his prose stories are superb.

Andre Maurois

## WESTERN STAR

by Stephen Vincent Benet

Reviewed by Harry Williams

**Western Star** is not an inappropriate title for Stephen Vincent Benet's last book. The author of **John Brown's Body**, takes us for the last time into the stirring past of the America he knew so well and sang so much about. No poet during the past hundred years, either English or American, has made such a notable contribution to Literature, burned such rich incense to the Muses as Benet with his immortal **John Brown's Body**. Not since Keats' **Endymion**, and the **Orion** of Richard Henry Horne has there arisen a poetic work of such stature. **Western Star** is a worthy successor. It is of the same good wholesome homespun poetry and as such is an authentic picture of the early settlement of American colonies. Through its pages move the familiar figures of Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain John Smith, Lord de la War and others.

With **Western Star** the author takes his place along with Mark Twain as the historian of the early America. His poetry like the great humorist's prose grows from the soil itself.

Farrar and Rinehart

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## PIPELINE TO BATTLE

by Major Peter W. Rainer

Reviewed by Captain Carroll Sibley

This account of an engineer's adventures with the British Eighth Army is not just another war book, based on documents and reports. Rather it is a yarn of personal adventure through three years of desert warfare, described by an eyewitness at white heat. The result is a spontaneous series of anecdotes, some grim, some humorous, that occurred in the vivid, smoke-charged atmosphere of battle.

Major Rainier, a mining engineer by

profession, was given the job of delivering water to the men on the front lines. Compelled to use every kind of ingenuity he could summon, it was his method to build pipelines just as close behind the foremost columns as he could, when the British advanced; and when they retreated, he would destroy his work—if he could. During three years of campaigns across Egypt, Libya, Tripolitania and Tunisia, he became known as "The Water Bloke," and developed into a true disciple of Kipling's "but when it comes to slaughter you'll do your work on water."

Needless to say, he drilled scores of wells and built many hundreds of miles of pipelines. In some cases he was even able to make use of the reservoirs or "birs" which had been constructed twenty centuries earlier by the Roman colonists and which he found well hidden underground in a fair state of preservation.

His description of the Battle of El Alamein is especially good. When the history of the war is written, he ventures that it "will prove to have been the decisive land battle of the world conflict." This book was begun immediately after that battle, "and written spasmodically as opportunity offered." If statistics and the official record differ from his account, Major Rainier is not concerned. "I regard such difference as immaterial because this book is not a history but a record of the impressions, made upon a participant, of a series of historical events of great importance."

The illustrations are scanty, but the manufacturing job and format are excellent.

Random House

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## STEPHEN VINCENT BENET

He was a gentle soul—more dear to me Than many another writer of his time. His tender heart and sweet simplicity Excelled his lofty eloquence of rhyme.

Clayton Hamilton

## MARK'S LETTERS TO WILL BOWEN

Edited by Theodore Hornberger

Reviewed by Cyril Clemens

This series of delightful and informative letters that Mark wrote to his boyhood chum Will Bowen (1836-1893) during the period 1866 to 1888 present fresh glimpses of the humorist. The first letter written from Waikiki Sugar Plantation Island of Maui, May 7, 1866, contains an amusing anecdote,

"I have seen a fellow here that you and I knew in Hannibal in childhood—named Martin—he was a carpenter; he came here busted a year ago and called himself the Wizard of the East and gave a sleight of hand entertainment,—and it was the d—dest sleight of hand entertainment you ever heard of. He tried to shoot a pocket handkerchief into a closed oyster-can, and he pretty nearly shot the d—d head off of a Kanaka spectator. None of his apparatus would work. He had a learned pig, which he gave out could speak seven languages, too—a striped learned pig. He told me he caught that hog in the extinct crater of Haleakala, 10,000 feet above the level of the sea, where the son of a sea horse had been running wild for three generations; he brought him down here into the valley, shaved him close, painted stripes on him with iodine, and then greased him, and advertised that he would give any person in the audience ten dollars who would come into the ring and catch the pig and hold him two minutes. A big brawny Kanaka and a gigantic Missourian each got the hog by a hind leg, and held on, notwithstanding the grease, but the hog turned and bit a square meal out of the Kanaka and made him let go, and then started, and took the bold Missourian straight through the audience, squealing, and upsetting people and benches, and raising more hell, and scaring women to death, and broke for high ground on Haleakala, and neither he nor the Missourian were ever

## MOTHER AMERICA

By Colonel Carlos P. Romulo

Reviewed by Captain Carroll Sibley

Judged by depth of feeling and lucidity of expression, "Mother America" is one of the most remarkable non-fiction volumes of the year. Nor is it too much to predict the possibility of its finding a place for itself as a minor classic on the subject of the Philippines and their relations with the United States.

Col. Romulo, who has had both a distinguished editorial and military career, has the soldier's knack for penetrating to the essence of a situation, the journalists instinct to give credit where credit is due, as in his statement: "Within forty-two years, the span of my lifetime, the Philippines have changed destinies. My country achieved the short cut to democracy under the kindly guidance of Mother America."

In the classical pattern, Romulo was born to poverty, came up the hard way, and has vivid memories of himself as a small boy who wore no shoes but had the good sense to take advantage of the public school facilities provided by Mother America.

In passages that are always sincere and sometimes inspired, the author has little difficulty infecting the reader with the fundamental sameness of his peoples and ours: "Like the Americans, we love a jest . . . We have an overwhelming desire to be thought well of and liked. We are friendly and smile easily. And, most important of all, we are fellow Christians. Filipinos and Americans worship the same God."

Romulo has tremendous admiration for General MacArthur, on whose staff he has served, and for President Roosevelt, whom he met just eight years ago at Notre Dame, when both were award-

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heard of afterwards—and Martin wasn't for some time, for in the melee he took his little cash-box and 'shoved'."

Austin: The University of Texas

ed honorary Doctor of Laws degrees. He shares the conviction of America's leaders that imperialism rarely confers benefits on the subject countries. "There is a psychic difference between being ill in prison and being ill under an open sky," he replies in rebuttal to those who contend that his country should never attempt self-government. Though he expresses profound gratitude to America's guardianship that followed Spain's despotic rule over his country, he can never bring himself to agree with the British policy of imperialism, which appears to be his one phobia. Doubleday Doran

Steve Benet was a genuine man and a real poet—the genius of his family of writers. His chief metier lay in the folk ballad—and American literature is always the richer, for his *Ballad of William Sycamore* and many more. He was a master of the short story form, as well I have always regretted that his best known short story, **The Devil and Daniel Webster**, heroized a man not nearly so heroic in stature as his great contemporaries, gigantic John C. Calhoun, amiable Henry Clay, sturdy old Thomas Hart Benton, and the rest. Technically, certainly, the story deserved all the praise it received. His longest poem **John Brown's Body**, had spots of high beauty in it, and a compelling treatment of one of the wild fanatics whose sum total is responsible for much that is most typically American today. Clement Wood

#### GREENSLET'S UNDER THE BRIDGE

Reviewed by Katharine Clemens

This is the delightful autobiography of a truly cultured American. The beauty of Lac St-Sacrement in Northern New York, first taught him to appreciate nature. Then, his love of books, and later his editorship of **The Atlantic Monthly** and his presidency of Houghton Mifflin and Company have made him an authority on matters literary. He early commenced taking frequent trips to Europe. For any American has a difficult time in becoming thoroughly cultured without a first hand knowledge

of Europe. Of junketing abroad he says, "the first voyage (there) is only the rinsing out of the goblet of pleasure" and "seeing beautiful things clears the muddy turbulence of the streams of life and for this did Our Lord rise 1943 years ago." Greenslet particularly admired lovely Taormina saturated with historic associations and the purple Alban hills near Rome.

As editor Greenslet met numerous men of letters. Henry Adams he describes as "small, scraggly-bearded, coolly polite." Greenslet used to attend "the twelve o'clock breakfasts where Henry Adams continued his Education by entertaining beautiful and clever young women, with a sprinkling of men, none too easy in the furniture provided for their occupancy."

He knew Willa Cather, Louise Imogen Guiney, T. B. Alrich, and Twain.

There are many apt quotations, such as the Doughboy Song of 1917,

"Goodbye, Maw, goodbye, Paw,

Goodbye, mule, with your old hee-haw  
I don't know what the war's about

But you bet, by gosh, I'll soon find out."

Ripening the mind of the reader as they do, these memoirs are indeed fructifying. The author speaks very beautifully of the approach to God by poets, saints, and dreamers.

Houghton Mifflin

Benet was truly a great writer, in the scope and validity of his thinking, in his command of the tools of written expression, and in the vastness of the canvas on which he strove to depict America and its people. I liked immensely his honesty and earthiness, his cleanness and Americanism. I liked his sensitivity to all things genuinely beautiful, his freedom from pretense and posture, and his spiritual vitality.

It took America a long time to discover his big calibre—while it was applauding littler men with less to say. But our country did discover him eventually, in all his fine proportions. In the years to come, we shall appreciate him even more.

Lew Sarett





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